

**Rear Admiral Al Harms, USN**  
**Deputy Commander in Chief, U.S. Pacific Fleet**  
**Midway Island Commemoration Ceremony**  
**Midway Island**  
**June 4, 2000**

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Good morning Midway residents, veterans, shipmates, distinguished guests, families and friends, ladies and gentlemen...It is truly an honor to be here with you today to commemorate the 58<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Battle of Midway. To celebrate this incredibly important event in the history of our nation, our military and our Navy--on an island so indelibly linked to all three--is a wonderful and moving experience. Thank you for joining me and countless others around the world who proudly take time to honor the courageous veterans who sacrificed so much in this historic battle to ensure the freedom that we all enjoy today. So fitting is it that we pay tribute to the heroes of Midway, that our Chief of Naval Operations (Admiral Jay Johnson) decreed that our Navy will mark two major events each calendar year to honor our naval traditions and all shipmates, past and present; one will be the Navy Birthday in October to celebrate our beginnings as a service and the other will be a Midway remembrance in June to honor the unparalleled courage, unbeatable warrior spirit, countless sacrifices and ultimate dedication of our Sailors and Marines. That is why we're here today!

Before I make my formal remarks, I want to recognize our very special "guest of honor" today...a Midway veteran. Captain William C. Dozier (U.S. Navy, retired) is with us today and he served aboard USS TAMBOR (SS 198) as Ensign Dozier during the Battle of Midway. What a way to start your distinguished career---thank you sir, for your extraordinary service and thank you for being with us today.

As I look around at this beautiful island, it's hard to picture what it must have been like in the midst of the Battle of Midway. What fire and fury there must have been starting a little past 0600, 58 years ago this very morning, June 4, 1942. Wave after wave of enemy aircraft (over 100 enemy strikers in all) commenced a massive air attack on our forces stationed here at Midway Island. Today, there is little lasting imprint of the death and destruction that took place

here during the ensuing fight. To picture it, we must detach our minds from the beautiful environment we're in right now. On that morning, we would not have heard the soothing and peaceful sound of birds and the ocean that are so full of life today. Instead, we would have been overwhelmed by the sounds of warfare – planes roaring overhead, bombs detonating, rifles cracking, machine guns roaring, anti-aircraft guns barking, large and small explosions, fire, heat, debris, and the awful sounds of dying and wounded men suffering in every direction. Yes, It's hard for most of us to imagine what that must have been like. Thankfully, through the passing of time, wounds heal and the true horror and impact of war blurs in our memory.

However, today we're here to remember. And we're here to commemorate the epic role that the Battle of Midway played in the war in the Pacific. The victory at Midway was the first ray of brightness in what had been a discouraging time for our Pacific Fleet and our nation. It changed the very course of the “war of all wars” in our favor.

Coming off the attack at Pearl Harbor, the Pacific Fleet was in trouble and barely holding its own. The weeks leading up to the Battle of Midway were our darkest hours in the Pacific. Japanese forces were rapidly pushing southward to isolate Australia, and Admiral Yamamoto was leading his carrier striking force east to search out and destroy the remainder of the Pacific Fleet – in particular, those carriers that were missed at Pearl Harbor. Yamamoto's major goal was to occupy as many Western Pacific Islands as possible – including Midway – in order to secure a broad defensive perimeter.

U.S. forces, still bruised from the surprise attack on Pearl Harbor a mere seven months earlier, and barely gaining a narrow victory in the Battle of Coral Sea, prepared to confront the Japanese Navy at Midway—a very strong Navy who came to conquer. They committed 4 large carriers, 2 light carriers, over 300 aircraft, 11 battleships, 14 cruisers, 16 submarines, 42 destroyers and more than 30 supporting ships, including transports carrying over 5,000 troops to take this crucial island. Make no doubt about it, Japanese strategists expected to draw the U.S. Pacific Fleet from Pearl Harbor and into a decisive battle where they believed they could smash the American fleet, forcing our nation to a negotiated peace. To halt this invading armada, we sent three carriers -- ENTERPRISE, HORNET, and the battle-damaged YORKTOWN – no battleships, 8 cruisers, 16 destroyers, 19 submarines and a total of 360 aircraft, including 234 carrier-based fighters and small bombers. Of the 126 aircraft stationed here on Midway, most of their pilots had never before flown a single combat mission.

Despite the overwhelming numbers and momentum advantage for Japan, our forces had a significant advantage due to a military intelligence break-through that gave us their intent, and knowledge of where the attack would come in advance. Our breaking of the Japanese code and discovering their intentions at Midway enabled Admiral Nimitz to plan for this pivotal battle. Even with this advantage, we still faced enormous odds and certainly had no guarantee of victory. It was only through their unwavering courage, indomitable fighting spirit, sheer determination and heroic combat efforts that the battered U.S. Navy and Marine Corps halted the Japanese advance. To this day, the Battle of Midway stands out as one of the greatest naval victories in our history, abruptly ending Japan's eastward progress and turning the tide of the war in the Pacific. It is a victory that would not have been possible if not for the overwhelming courage and greatest of sacrifices by the men on and around Midway that fateful day.

During the battle, the Japanese forces suffered enormous losses, including the four carriers that were present during the attack on Pearl Harbor - one cruiser, almost 300 aircraft, and over 4,000 lives. But the victory did not come without significant cost to us too...American losses included the carrier Yorktown, a destroyer, 150 planes, and 307 lives. An extraordinary victory, won by extraordinary men at an extraordinary cost!

As we commemorate this most crucial event in the course of the war, let us never forget that the significance of the Battle of Midway was far greater than just a hard fought battle won decisively against a strong enemy. It was a much needed emotional lift and momentum shift, an exhilarating and motivating morale boost that finally demonstrated that American forces had what it took to defeat the Japanese forces, and it was partial retribution for the shattering defeat suffered at Pearl Harbor just 7 months before. After the battle was over, Admiral Chester Nimitz declared, "Pearl Harbor has now been partially avenged."

The story of June 4th, 1942, and of our nation's long and valiant struggle in the Pacific, is not just a story of ships and aircraft, intelligence specialists, grand strategies, ferocious battles and courageous warriors. It's a story of a generation of Americans who had a "rendezvous with destiny" as Roosevelt stated. World War II, and the Battle of Midway in particular, is a story of their legacy, and it lives on today. It's a story of young Sailors and Marines, a story of people... ordinary people who were cast into the cauldron of conflict, and emerged as heroes.

Today, we pause to honor these heroes and reconfirm that we have not forgotten them and their actions. This island is a living tribute to America's veterans who made the supreme

sacrifice for the cause of freedom, many of them resting silently in these waters that surround us. By meeting here today, we graciously acknowledge the incredible debt owed them for our freedom. We especially recognize the debt owed all Midway veterans – those who perished in that fateful battle and those who lived on to serve in other action throughout the Pacific.

Whereas Midway marked a major turning point in the war, it was but one of the first offensive salvos in a war that would go on to take the lives of thousands of American Sailors and Marines.

So to Captain Dozier and all those Midway veterans around the world who are commemorating this historical event, we salute you for your service and your sacrifice. And to the many more who were killed in Midway and beyond, we renew our commitment to maintain peace throughout the world, to protect America's freedom, and hopefully ensure there are no more great wars.

It is their legacy of commitment and freedom that allows us to gather here today in peace and prosperity while we honor those who served and died in war. Like so many times in our history, Midway is about a group of Americans who served unselfishly and courageously when called. Tom Brokaw closes his book, The Greatest Generation, appropriately with this passage about honoring these great men and women: "No fanfare is required. They've had their parades. They've heard the speeches. They know what they have accomplished, and they are proud. They will have their World War II memorial and their place in the ledgers of history, but no block of marble or elaborate edifice can equal their lives of sacrifice and achievement, duty and honor, as monuments to their time."

I think that it is fitting that we have such ceremonies as today's, and that we take the time from our own busy lives to reflect on the greatness of their lives and that time--not only out of respect for that greatest generation, but also to remind those of us who follow in their footsteps what service and sacrifice are all about. As service members and citizens, we--their sons and daughters-- strive today to fully honor and justify their incredible sacrifices. And during moments like this, I'm humbled and comforted by the words of Abraham Lincoln in his famous Gettysburg address. Timeless sentiments, his thoughts clearly describe our feelings of this special place. "We can not dedicate—we can not consecrate—we can not hallow this sacred ground. The brave men, living and dead, who struggled here, have consecrated it far above our poor power to add or detract. It is rather for us to be here dedicated to the great task remaining before us—that from these honored dead we take increased devotion to that cause for which they

gave the last full measure of devotion...that this nation, under God, shall have a new birth of freedom.”

Let us remember the past here at Midway Island in order to preserve and guide our future. We humbly honor the Sailors and Marines who so valiantly fought in this great battle as a constant reminder of the cost of our freedom, and of hope and inspiration for the young men and women who will lead us through the years ahead.

Thank you Midway warriors, thank you Midway veterans, and thank you all for sharing in this tremendously important occasion. May God bless our great nation, our mighty Navy and Marine Corps, all of our veterans, past and present, and each and every one of you.